



# GABROVO PILOT CITY: FINAL ARTICLE

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Written by

**Elena Vlaeva**

**Chief Expert, Culture and Tourism Department**

Gabrovo Municipality

FINAL  
ARTICLE





# BACKGROUND

We are facing a stage of our urban development related to strategic planning and working with our hearts for Gabrovo to become a pleasant city for life, accepting culture as a mission and cause, realizing its potential, setting out the right priorities, analyzing weaknesses, working long and hard to improve some aspects in our work and others to become stronger.

Our participation in the network of **Pilot Cities** established by the Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Culture Action Europe is part of the process that led us to win the title of **Creative City by UNESCO**, a process that began in 2013 with the city's application for European Capital of Culture 2019.

Now, I suggest you to turn back in time, because I believe it's really important to remember where we come from.

Gabrovo applied for European Capital of Culture. Is it a madness or is it a stroke of genius? The answer to this question can be neither brief nor straightforward. Dozens, and maybe hundreds of people, found the idea pure madness. They described it as a lack of common sense and of a sober assessment of possibilities. Glimpsed in the excavated streets of Gabrovo at that time, citizens never tried to look at the stars. Generally they were more likely to grumble, as townspeople rarely praise. Years of disillusionment cannot be compensated with a few days of hopefulness. And when distrust has become a way of life, we cannot suddenly overcome it.

But if we choose to outlast the others, we can do it with a joke and a smile, a wink, an innovation, or a gift from God! And there we went!

The Funny Gabrovo reminded that it's the capital of the center of Bulgaria, has its territory in space - planet "Gabrovo", a steamship in the forest and a monument in the river. And the Serious Gabrovo, with pride and respect, remembered Vasil Aprilov (founder and main contributor of the first Bulgarian secular school), Emanuel Manolov (the first Bulgarian professional music composer), Todor Burmov (the first Bulgarian Prime-Minister). This Serious Gabrovo keeps the traditions in the Open-air Ethnographic Museum "Etar" (the only one of its kind in Bulgaria), gives life to laughter in the House of Humour and Satire Museum (the only one of its kind in Bulgaria and in the Universe), tells about the first secular New Bulgarian school in the National Museum of Education, and keeps alive the spirit of old Bulgarian times in the Museum of the architectural historical reserve Bozhentsi.

In 2013, we stated the following: We are convinced that the past is our future and we are working for our heirs to have that conviction as well. But most important is the present, which allows us the possibility to cross the thin line between madness and genius and as true Gabrovians we decided to use that possibility!

And we did! See how, in [this video](#).



# STRENGTHENING CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Gabrovo was eliminated for the European Capital of Culture title, but somehow the natural way led us into the network of Pilot Cities, probably because we started to gain confidence. Confidence of a city according to the Dostoevsky style, described as an 'unintentional city' with a special kind of urban environment that is not astonishing with its architectural masterpieces and archaic layers of history, but has a spirit and character of its own.

The Gabrovo Municipality was strongly motivated by the principles and ideas of the Agenda 21 for Culture and consciously began to lead a purposeful and consistent policy to develop the relationship between the cultural activities of the city and sustainable development.

The Municipality established a Culture Development Strategy for the period 2014-2024 and a Culture Program for co-financing projects, with an annual budget of 50 000 EUR.

By entering the Pilot Cities programme, the Gabrovo Municipality relied on a few key principles:

- Equal access to culture;
- Cultural diversity;
- Use of public spaces as cultural ones;
- Transparency of information and public participation in cultural policy-making;
- Protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage;
- Promoting civic and private initiatives for diversity and quality of cultural projects.

In 2017, according to a **self-assessment of cultural life and cultural policies** conducted a few months earlier, and working meetings with representatives of the cultural environment in Gabrovo and experts from the Agenda 21 for culture, a **work programme** was developed. The main measures in this programme included:

1. Educational initiatives
2. Laboratory for Innovation and Culture
3. Promotion of Gabrovo Municipality as a preferred territory for creative industries and art residences
4. Managing culture through the creation of public councils / public consultation process

In parallel to this, through strict principles in culture policies, purposeful actions in the field of culture, creative processes for the preservation and promotion of traditions and



# STRENGTHENING CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

folk art, in 2017 Gabrovo became a member of the **UNESCO Creative Cities Network** in the field of crafts and folk art.

Significant resources have been invested in the implementation of valuable cultural initiatives and in support of quality cultural products. These activities continue to transform culture and tourism into main factors for the economic development of Gabrovo as an attractive tourist destination with preserved natural resources, a rich cultural calendar and the potential to create innovative attractions.

The policy of supporting and promoting the creation of innovative cultural products, the decentralization of cultural life, and attracting new audiences through the provision of financial resources under the Culture Program has continued for 9 years, respecting the principles of transparency, competitiveness and objectivity.

Through an integrated approach of planning and organizing, the cultural calendar is rich and full with various events. Key festivals are those dedicated to the main characteristic of Gabrovo - city of humour and crafts. We are trying to find new, attractive and provocative elements in content, format and participants. With the kind support from the Gabrovo Municipality, several world famous artists were part of different festivals in Gabrovo.

There have been significant investments in the infrastructure of cultural institutions. All data of existing buildings suitable for cultural events is collected and systematized. All important information of cultural infrastructure and terms and conditions of use are publicly available through the Municipality's administrative website and GIS system.

The **Creative Tourism Forum** was held in Gabrovo in March 2018 with experts from the field of creative tourism from different countries. They presented successful practices and approaches – on how creative thinking is used as a tourist resource and engine for development, how local traditions and crafts can be an innovation in tourism and how to promote a creative product and destination. The Forum was attended by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, representatives of prestigious organizations such as the International Creative Tourism Network, the Association for Industrial Tourism (Spain), TEATA (Thai Association for Ecological and Adventure Tourism), and New Destinations (International Business Network for Tourism), journalists and bloggers. At this event Gabrovo was proclaimed a Creative Friendly destination and was invited to become a member of the **Creative Tourism Network**, which is a fact from 2019.



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT CITIES WORK PROGRAMME

As outlined above, the work programme designed in the context of Pilot Cities involved four strands. Activities implemented in this context are described hereafter.

## 1. EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

A variety of educational initiatives aimed at children and young people have been implemented within the project “Your Time” (2016 - 2018), financed by the EU Operational Program “Science and Education for Smart Growth”. Through these initiatives, the education system has taken an important step in fostering the creativity and creative thinking of children and young people.

This process has continued in educational institutions, and since 2019 it has been part of the Activities of Interests as follows:

- Developing students’ creative potential;
- Involvement of students by forming communities of interest;
- Making the school a more attractive place for development and performances.

A municipal programme for culture has also been developed, for pupils from the first to the fourth grade (6-11 years old), which takes place during the summer holiday. Children visit the nearby Uzana Mountain Resort, Gradishte and Sokolski Monastery, and the villages of Jivko and Igljika. There they can enjoy the mountain nature, learning about its inhabitants and value. Children visit all local museums – Historical Museum Gabrovo, National Educational Museum, The House of Humour and Satire Museum, the Interactive Museum of Industry, the Open-air Ethnographic Museum “Etar”, the Museum of the architectural historical reserve Bozhentsi, the Regional Library, and the Art Gallery in Gabrovo. They learn the value of those cultural sites through fun games and entertainment. The Gabrovo Municipality provided around 65 000 EUR for the summer activities between 2016 and 2019.

Serious investments in human capital have been made through the provision of training opportunities and exchange of experiences. I will mention only a few directly related to our participation in the network of Pilot Cities:

- Participation in the annual conference of Culture Action Europe, Beyond the Obvious, in Gothenburg (2015).
- A Gabrovo delegation **visited Timisoara** (Romania), also part of the Pilot Cities Europe network. The purpose of the trip was exploring opportunities for partnership and exchange of best practices.



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT CITIES WORK PROGRAMME

- From September 26 to 30, 2018 Gabrovo Municipality representatives **visited the cities of Barcelona and Terrassa**, Spain. The main objectives were related to the presentation and discussion of the key points in cultural policies of both cities and how they correspond for the sustainable development of cities themselves.
- From April 10 to 12, 2019 **a working meeting was held in Gabrovo**. The topic of the meeting was involving artists, cultural organizations and citizens in shared artistic adventures. Participants included 14 representatives from the cultural sector in Gabrovo, as well as guest-participants Imma Vilches from Terrassa, with 12 years' experience in implementation and preparation of cultural projects; Catherine Cullen, advisor and expert of the Pilot Cities programme for Gabrovo; and Emmanuel Vinchon, with extensive experience in managing projects in many European cities, mostly candidates for the European Capital of Culture, who led the workshop. The purpose of the meeting was to focus and raise awareness, through a discussion among various stakeholders, of how Gabrovo residents altogether could work on inclusive projects.

I will mention only another project that offered very interesting and useful trainings - "One click away", the project was implemented by the House of Humour and Satire Museum in Gabrovo. A total of 130 participants in four workshops participated in the training, 20 of them participated in all modules. The trainings were aimed at those working in the field of culture and art in Gabrovo. The last workshop significantly expanded its scope and it was attended by specialists from museums in Ruse, Pleven, Lovech, Troyan, Polski Trambesh, Kazanlak and Tryavna. The participants gained practical knowledge and skills in: creating and publishing audio content on a podcast; creating a script / storyboard for capturing, processing and publishing video content; blogging and content planning, as well as what are the current trends in new technologies of museum exhibitions.

## 2. LABORATORY FOR INNOVATION AND CULTURE

Gabrovo Municipality is a partner organization in the project proposal "Creative industries for new urban economic development in the Danube Region". This partnership of municipalities, business support organisations, SMEs, creatives and NGOs will:

- develop three roadmaps to support the shaping of new and restructuring of old urban economies meeting environmental and social challenges of the Danube Region, like the revitalisation of abandoned buildings and deserted city centres;



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT CITIES WORK PROGRAMME

- develop tools and services for business support organisations and policy makers to improve the capacities for innovation among cultural industries and urban economy sectors with strong focus on start-up activities
- pilot all tools to bring creative spirit and innovation to urban economy sectors and initialize 5 cross-sectoral collaboration projects and establish 4 cultural industry support centres
- build a sustainable network of key actors in urban development
- prepare a set of transnational policy recommendations including 9 local action plans

The budget for Gabrovo Municipality will be 222 000 EUR. The realization of the project will fill with new content the Palauzov school in Gabrovo, as well as the famous “Sixth district” in central Gabrovo.

### 3. PROMOTION OF GABROVO MUNICIPALITY AS A PREFERRED TERRITORY FOR CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND ART RESIDENCES

We will give as an example what has been achieved in 2017.

The main goal of the Gabrovo Municipality is to turn the region into a favorite place for creative residencies and support the creation of new cultural formats and products that exceed the limits of Gabrovo. To ensure direct and indirect economic benefits to the community, 7 creative and educational residencies were realized in August 2017. Playwrights, architects, artists, graphic designers, and young entrepreneurs accumulated knowledge and exchanged experiences in the Museum of the architectural historical reserve Bozhentsi and the Open-air Ethnographic Museum “Etar”:

- **Summer Scriptwriting Base** for dramatic writing “Die laughing”. The academy was organized by Arte Urbana Collective - Sofia, Gabrovo Municipality, Open-air Ethnographic Museum “Etar” in partnership with French Institute – Bulgaria, the House of Humour and Satire Museum, British Council, Famille Mundi Theater Company - Paris, Eurodram, Maison d’Europe et d’Orient. Participants from 24 countries conducted training workshops for documentary, theater and writing.
- **“Typoclass”** - a Font Design Workshop was held at Museum of the architectural historical reserve Bozhentsi, organized by Design Studio “Redesign” with participants from home and abroad. The lecturer was Lucas de Groot - one of





# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT CITIES WORK PROGRAMME

the most respected masters of this art in the world. The workshop was held as part of the “Typoclass” educational programme, in which only two and three-day workshops have been held so far. This was the first module to “break down” the normal life of the participants and last two weeks. The organizers chose Bozhentsi because of the opportunity for privacy and active creative work.

- In a partnership with the regional association of municipalities “Stara planina” and Veliko Tarnovo University, the Museum in Bozhentsi realized the project “Glass braid” for the second year in a row. The initiative implemented a demonstrations and workshop for hot and cold glass processing, which attracted and involved over 500 visitors.
- The authentic color of Bozhentsi inspired the participants in the traditional International Painting Fest 2017, organized by the Art Gallery - Gabrovo and the Union of Bulgarian Artists.
- That beautiful place also hosted the first national summer camp “The Entrepreneur as a Discoverer”, organized by Gabrovo Municipality, the Regional district point Gabrovo and Bauersachs Foundation.
- The second edition of KEVIS 2017 - Art Symposium on Land Art and Kinetic Art was held in the Open-air Ethnographic Museum “Etar”. Organizers included ALOS - Center for Informal Education and Cultural Activity and Open-air Ethnographic Museum “Etar”; Partner included: “Art in Action” Association - Sofia, Sofia University “Kliment Ohridski” -Department Visual Arts, WWF Bulgaria, with the support of America for Bulgaria Foundation and local companies. Following the KEVIS pilot edition (2015) a youth symposium on water-powered kinetic art, the emphasis of the second edition was the expression of various generations of contemporary authors ready to experimenting in the fields of land art and kinetic art.
- For the second year, the Educational Program “In the World of Old Balkans Architecture”, organized by Association “Mestra - Traditional Knowledge and Crafts”, the Chamber of Architects in Bulgaria was held in the Open Air Ethnographic Museum. The lectures were dedicated to Bulgarian Revival architecture, preservation of cultural heritage and practical activities.

## **4. MANAGING CULTURE THROUGH THE CREATION OF PUBLIC COUNCILS / PUBLIC CONSULTATION PROCESS**

Although a structure called the Public Council on Culture has not been formally established, the dialogue and demand for a broad public debate on the cultural policy of



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PILOT CITIES WORK PROGRAMME

the Municipality with cultural and educational institutes, non-governmental organizations, creative unions, individual creators and others continue.

We also work closely with local, regional and state cultural institutions for connecting the tourist with cultural attractions that can reflect on him, foster participation, stimulate creativity, and provoke new ideas. For the easy access to information and quick feedback a Google research group has been created.

The priorities of the Gabrovo Municipality's Culture Programme, different proposals for the cultural calendar of the Municipality, and the budget for that are discussed on many work meetings.



# ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES AND REFLECTIONS

At the end of this report, we will represent facts that have been achieved in response to our efforts to meet the essential requirements of the Pilot Cities program and achieve our common goals.

**Aim – Focus on the connection between culture and urban planning. Consider culture as an important factor for the transformation of public spaces**

**Outcome** - The Marcothea and Koleloto parks, two recently-renewed urban parks, are increasingly becoming scenes for cultural events - eco festivals, sporting initiatives and festivals for children. There is a detachable stage on the Radetska street with seats for the audience. The space has become a traditional place for outdoor concerts and puppetry. Another good example are the houses for books, which are situated in different parts of the city, as a perfect place for exchanging books and reading.

The renovation of the House of Culture “Emanuil Manolov” is upcoming. A project proposal has been submitted for the restoration of the former Summer Theater and its transformation into a youth center.

**Aim - Connection between natural wonders and culture**

**Outcome** - Gabrovo has very beautiful geographical features, which we turn into an advantage. The mountain and the river which pass through the city are a significant part of our urban life and culture. The Carnival season starts on the river street. We keep the national traditions on “Bogoiavlenie” (a tradition of the Bulgarian church). On that day the Priest throws a Cristian cross from wood in the cold waters of the river and it is believed that whoever retrieves the Cristian cross will be healthy throughout the year and will enjoy prosperity.

The “Dunav” and “Avram Gachev” streets have been improved, and a bridge over the river between them has been built. Now they have become a very attractive place for meetings and relaxing. The bridge has become a cultural space, a place for bazaars, workouts, kango jumps, Latino dances and other activities.

**Aim - Promote international relations and programs in the field of culture**

**Outcome** - Attracting artists from abroad who devote themselves to the city, giving their help in dealing with various challenges. A good example for that is the cultural exchanges between Gabrovo and its partner cities – Thun, Switzerland and Mitishti,



# ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES AND REFLECTIONS

Russia. The Drama Theater in Gabrovo invited artists like the famous directors Petrinel Gochev and Vasil Duev. The initiative of Gabrovo Municipality called “The Families” represents artists from the city, which become famous outside the city and abroad – for example artists Solakovi and violinists Minchevi.

**Aim - Balanced cultural policy between public and private sector**

**Outcome** – Culture Programme and Youth Programme activities. For the past four years the Culture Programme of Gabrovo Municipality financed projects for 345 011 BGN (around 172 500 EUR) and the Youth Programme supported activities totalling 27 688 BGN (13 787 EUR)

Overall this has involved support for creative industries, individual artists, NGOs and community centers, including a significant number of organizations carrying out activities outside the city center.

**Aim – Culture life in suburbs of the city - support for quality cultural projects targeting the suburbs and areas surrounding the city.**

**Outcome** - The regional waste landfill located on the outskirts of the city is often used as a cultural scene, with events for children organized on site, theater performances played at Park Markoteia. A project under the EEA grants will move the cultural activities from the center to the periphery. Five new cultural places will be created.



# FURTHER REFERENCE AND FOLLOW-UP

## **Public State Grant for Community Centers in Gabrovo Municipality 2016 – 2019**

1 460 515 BGN (748 982 EUR) - 94% of them are distributed in neighborhoods and small settlements.

## **Assistance for Community Centers and other NGOs 2016 – 2019**

- Community center “Gabrovo 2002” – for Festival of brass music – each year 2 000 EUR, 8000 EUR total
- Magic festival “Golden cat” – 17 000 EUR
- Community center “Svetlina 1927” - Folklore Festival “Songs in the foot of the mountain” - 2019 – 500 EUR. The Gabrovo Municipality provided substantial prizes for participants and guests in previous years.
- **“Take me in your village” initiative**, which is given as an example of good practice to other Pilot Cities. Over the years, 12 villages and 249 young people have participated in it with external funding of 47 000 EUR and support from Gabrovo Municipality of 20 000 EUR.

In order to bring all above to the world, to be easily recognizable and define Gabrovo as a brand, we went through the first stage of our development - we built a new visual identity of Gabrovo. Next year with more funds and knowledge the process will continue.

This is the picture from today, we are happy and proud of what we have achieved, but also realize, that there are many more things to do, because the more we expand our circle of knowledge, the wider the circle of ignorance becomes!





# CONTACTS

For additional information about this exercise, please contact:



## City of Gabrovo

[pilot-city@gabrovo.bg](mailto:pilot-city@gabrovo.bg)

Web: <http://gabrovo.bg/>

<http://visit.gabrovo.bg/>



## Committee on Culture of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

Email: [info@agenda21culture.net](mailto:info@agenda21culture.net)

Web: [www.agenda21culture.net](http://www.agenda21culture.net)



